

Feb. 2, 2026

Plan Commission Members
Alder Matthews, District 12
Alder Glenn, District 18

Agenda Items 8 and 9
Legistar Items 91289 and 91294

RE: I request that you vote NO on this project and send it back to the community for greater input and assistance so that we can work with the developer on a better project that will meet the needs of the neighborhood and the people who live in it, now and in the future.

Dear Plan Commissioners and Alders,

I am writing to you concerning the proposed development located in District 12 at 2103 Sherman Avenue.

Per your agenda, the topics to be of consideration are:

Note: Items 8 and 9 are related and will be considered as one public hearing. Following the public hearing, the Plan Commission shall make separate findings and motions on each agenda item.

91289 8. 2103 Sherman Avenue (District 12): Consideration of a conditional use in the Neighborhood Mixed-Use (NMX) District for a mixed-use building containing greater than 60 dwelling units, and consideration of a conditional use in the NMX District for a building exceeding three stories and 40 feet in height, to allow construction of a five-story mixed-use building with approximately 1,100 square feet of commercial space and 87 dwelling units.

91294. 9. Approving a Certified Survey Map of property owned by 2211 Fordem Ave, LLC located at 2103 Sherman Avenue (District 12).

I am concerned with the height of the building, the residential density, traffic implications for Sherman Avenue as it turns off of Fordem and the overall impact of this proposed development on the neighborhood.

This project does not meet the area land use goals:

- Preserve the quiet enjoyment of homes, parks and neighborhoods;
- Employ universal design concepts to enhance accessibility and mobility for all residents;
- Improve the safety of pedestrian and bike transportation within the area and to adjoining neighborhoods;
- Preserve and restore the natural beauty of the river, lake and open spaces; making them accessible to all and encouraging their active use;
- Expand and promote accessible recreational options for a wide variety of individual and community recreational activities
 - Encourage green building and compact site design that minimizes resource consumption and environmental impacts.
 - Promote environmentally friendly features that protect and enhance Madison's natural resources.
 - Add passive and active green space whenever possible to redevelopment concepts.

In addition, this proposal does not meet the criteria of encouraging buildings that utilize architectural and landscape design elements that embody the character of the neighborhoods, and incorporating high quality materials and environmentally-sound building practices.

The neighborhood plan describes this area as primarily residential neighborhood for those looking for a quiet, safe and affordable home minutes by bike, car, or bus to downtown. I believe that the feedback we heard at the public meeting with area neighbors was that they like their neighborhoods. That this large facility is not in keeping with the neighborhood plan nor the overall feel of the neighborhood.

I request that you vote NO on this project and send it back to the community for greater input and assistance so that we can work with the developer on a better project that will meet the needs of the neighborhood.

I see an opportunity that we are completely missing. I do not see any of the street level units being offered as accessible for our disabled neighbors. It is rare that we see street level living space as there is normally street level commercial space requirements. In this facility, the street level units could be made highly accessible and built out to conform with ADA requirements. Let's think innovation and inclusion.

We can do better!

I am in complete agreement with and I am sharing a brilliant assessment of the proposed development prepared by Don Lindsay, my Northside neighbor (see below).

Please give the community the opportunity to make this project one that meets the needs of Northsiders.

Thank you.

Beth Sluys
District 18

* MGO 28.183 - CONDITIONAL USES [2]

HEIGHT OF THE BUILDING

The Planning Division's comment says,

"As noted above, the proposed building is five stories along Sherman (the building's front yard, where height is measured in the NMX district) and six stories along Fordem, which are both taller than the four-story ... recommendation in the Comprehensive Plan." [1; pp. 3 - 4 of 18]

City Engineering Division – Mapping Section (Contact Jeff Quamme, 608-266-4097) writes,

"32. The address of the apartment complex is 2126 Fordem Ave. The site plan shall reflect a proper street address of the property as reflected by official City of Madison Assessor's and Engineering Division records." [1; p. 11 of 18]

The developer has moved the front of the building from the street address to the back of the lot. This maneuver might be legal, but it artificially lowers the official height from six stories to five stories. The proposed building exceeds the number of stories allowed by NMX zoning by 67% on Sherman Ave. and by 100% on Fordem Ave.

The Staff Comment says that the height of the building, at the short end, is 63' 10 & 1/2" [1; p. 3 of 18]. This height does not include the 2 foot parapet. This height exceeds the 40 foot maximum height in the NMX zoning code by 60%.

The Staff Comment says that the height of the building, at the tall end, is 69' 10 & 1/2" [1; p. 3 of 18]. This height does not include the 2 foot parapet. This height exceeds the 40 foot maximum height in the NMX zoning [4] code by 75%.

Neither the developer nor the Staff Report offer any reason why the building height must exceed the height allowed in NMX zoning districts.

RESIDENTIAL DENSITY

The land use application says that the SARA project will have 86 residential units [3; p. 7 ~ 3 of 3]. This number exceeds the 60 units allowed in NMX zoning [5] by 43.33%. The resulting residential density is 126 units per acre [3; p. 7 ~ 3 of 3]. This residential density is many times that of the surrounding neighborhood of single family homes and small apartment buildings. The residential density of nearby McKenzie Place is 54.5 dwelling units per acre [6; p. 3], which is just 43.25% of the density of the SARA project. The proposed project's residential density is more than twice that of McKenzie Place.

As with the excessive height, the excessive residential density of the SARA project means that the proposed building does not fit the "aesthetic desirability" [2] or character of the neighborhood.

The Staff report says,

"Further, the calculated residential density is 115 units/acre, which is higher than the range of up to 70 units/acre for the NMU land use designation." [1; p. 4 of 18] The residential density exceeds what is recommended in the NMU land use designation by 64%. Neither the developer nor the Staff Report offer any reason why the project's residential density must exceed the density recommended for NMU neighborhoods.

MGO 28.183 - CONDITIONAL USES [2]

The Staff Report says,

"State law requires that conditional use findings must be based on "substantial evidence" that directly pertains to each standard and not based on personal preference or speculation."

...

"§28.183(6) M.G.O. lists sixteen approval standards, of which not all are applicable to every conditional use. For this request, Standards 7, 9, 10, and 12-16 do not apply, while standards 1-6, 8, and 11 are applicable. Staff believes that the Plan Commission can find standards 1, 2, 4, 5, and 6 to be met, and this report provides additional staff analysis regarding standards 3, 8, and 11." [1; p. 4 of 18]

For clarity, standards 3, 8, and 11 are copied here:

MGO 28.183 - CONDITIONAL USES says,

"No application for a conditional use shall be granted by the Plan Commission unless it finds that all of the following conditions are present:

...

"3. The uses, values and enjoyment of other property in the neighborhood for purposes already established will not be substantially impaired or diminished in any foreseeable manner."

...

"8. When applying the above standards to any new construction of a building or an addition to an existing building the Plan Commission shall find that the project creates an environment of sustained aesthetic desirability compatible with the existing or intended character of the area and the statement of purpose for the zoning district...."

...

"11. When applying the above standards to an application for height in excess of that allowed in the district, the Plan Commission shall consider recommendations in adopted plans; the impact on surrounding properties, including height, mass, orientation, shadows and view; architectural quality and amenities; the relationship of the proposed building(s) with adjoining streets, alleys, and public rights of ways; and the public interest in exceeding the district height limits. [3]

The Staff Report focuses too much on issues like the parking lot for the restaurant next door and the apartment building's facade. When people buy a house, they buy more than a building and land. They buy into the look and feel of the neighborhood. They rely on the zoning code to preserve an "environment of sustained aesthetic desirability compatible with the existing or intended character of the area and the statement of purpose for the zoning district" [3]. The excessive building height and residential density of the proposed project violate the zoning code and the expectations of the many nearby residents.

The Plan Commission must also beware of the precedent being set by the proposed apartment project. In the future, this proposed project will be the thin entering wedge used to justify similar oversized buildings throughout this area.

The developer proposes to put 86 apartments, 87 parking spaces, and 1,084 square feet of commercial space on a lot measuring 0.68 acres in size [3; p. 7 ~ 3 of 3]. It is like trying to sail a yacht in a bathtub.

Thank you for considering this comment.

Don Lindsay

SOURCES

[1] Staff Comment

<https://madison.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=F&ID=15156709&GUID=E89540D2-CDB9-43F6-B2EA-95F3F5306658>

Accessed 20260202

[2] MGO 28.183 - Conditional Uses

https://library.municode.com/wi/madison/codes/code_of_ordinances?nodeId=COORMAWIVOIICH20--31_CH28ZOCOOR_SUBCHAPTER_28LPR_28.183COUS

Accessed 20260125

[3] Application

<https://madison.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=F&ID=15035580&GUID=E490A351-D394-4D0C-8B7F-8ED616E49FB6>

Accessed 20260125

[4] Neighborhood Mixed Use (NMX) MGO 28.064

<https://madison.legistar.com/View.ashx?M=F&ID=15035580&GUID=E490A351-D394-4D0C-8B7F-8ED616E49FB6>

Accessed 20260125

[5] 28.061 - MIXED-USE AND COMMERCIAL DISTRICTS USES - includes NMX

https://library.municode.com/wi/madison/codes/code_of_ordinances?nodeId=COORMAWIVOIICH20--31_CH28ZOCOOR_SUBCHAPTER_28DMIECODI_28.061MIECODIUS

Accessed 20251209

Dwelling units in mixed-use buildings (>60 units) require a conditional use permit.

[6] Staff Report Legistar 39483

<https://madison.legistar.com/LegislationDetail.aspx?ID=2392676&GUID=5B5D0E62-C641-4C34-986B-07BD05613DFF&Options=IDIText&Search=39483>

Accessed 20260125

From: gordian@nym.hush.com
To: [Plan Commission Comments](#); [Matthews, Julia](#)
Subject: 2103 Sherman Staff Comment
Date: Sunday, February 1, 2026 6:34:21 PM

Caution: This email was sent from an external source. Avoid unknown links and attachments.

Feb. 1, 2026

Plan Commission members,

I would like to reply to several issues raised in the Staff Comment [1] on the proposed housing project at 2103 Sherman Ave. The Agenda Item numbers are #8 for Legistar 91289 and #9 for Legistar 91294.

Topics discussed are

- * Height of the Building
- * Residential density
- * MGO 28.183 - CONDITIONAL USES [2]

HEIGHT OF THE BUILDING

The Planning Division's comment says,

"As noted above, the proposed building is five stories along Sherman (the building's front yard, where height is measured in the NMX district) and six stories along Fordem, which are both taller than the four-story ... recommendation in the Comprehensive Plan." [1; pp. 3 - 4 of 18]

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The developer has moved the front of the building from the street address to the back of the lot. This maneuver might be legal, but it artificially lowers the official height from six stories to five stories. The proposed building exceeds the number of stories allowed by NMX zoning by 67% on Sherman Ave. and by 100% on Fordem Ave.

The Staff Comment says that the height of the building, at the short end, is 63' 10 & 1/2" [1; p. 3 of 18]. This height does not include the 2 foot parapet. This height exceeds the 40 foot maximum height in the NMX zoning code by 60%.

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Neither the developer nor the Staff Report offer any reason why the building height must exceed the height allowed in NMX zoning districts.

RESIDENTIAL DENSITY

The land use application says that the SARA project will have 86 residential units [3; p. 7 ~ 3 of 3]. This number exceeds the 60 units allowed in NMX zoning [5] by 43.33%. The resulting residential density is 126 units per acre [3; p. 7 ~ 3 of 3]. This residential density is many times that of the surrounding neighborhood of single family homes and small apartment buildings. The residential density of nearby McKenzie Place is 54.5 dwelling units per acre [6; p. 3], which is just 43.25% of the density of the SARA project. The proposed project's residential density is more than twice that of McKenzie Place.

As with the excessive height, the excessive residential density of the SARA project means that the proposed building does not fit the "aesthetic desirability" [2] or character of the neighborhood.

The Staff report says,

"Further, the calculated residential density is 115 units/acre, which is higher than the range of up to 70 units/acre for the NMU land use designation." [1; p. 4 of 18] The residential density exceeds what is recommended in the NMU land use designation by 64%. Neither the developer nor the Staff Report offer any reason why the project's residential density must exceed the density recommended for NMU neighborhoods.

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"8. When applying the above standards to any new construction of a building or an addition to an existing building the Plan Commission shall find that the project creates an environment of sustained aesthetic desirability compatible with the existing or intended character of the area and the statement of purpose for the zoning district...."

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The Plan Commission must also beware of the precedent being set by the proposed apartment project. In the future, this proposed project will be the thin entering wedge used to justify similar oversized buildings throughout this area.

The developer proposes to put 86 apartments, 87 parking spaces, and 1,084 square feet of commercial space on a lot measuring 0.68 acres in size [3; p. 7 ~ 3 of 3]. It is like trying to sail a yacht in a bathtub.

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Don Lindsay

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Accessed 20260125

From: [Jennifer Argelander](#)
To: [Plan Commission Comments](#)
Subject: Legistar Items 91289 and 91294
Date: Sunday, February 1, 2026 11:38:35 AM

You don't often get email from jargelander@yahoo.com. [Learn why this is important](#)

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Dear Plan Commissioners:

Please vote to oppose Legistar 91289 and 91294, which would grant a conditional use permit to SARA Investment Real Estate for construction of a large housing project at 2103 Sherman Ave.

The proposed development is inconsistent with several purposes specified in the Madison Zoning Code Ordinance. The Developer also seeks approval for two conditional use exceptions to the NMX zoning code: (1) to exceed the maximum height by over 65%; and (2) to exceed the number of units by 45%. Please review the table created and submitted to you by Nancy Thayer Hart. I agree with her concerns with this development as she clearly charted.

Traffic: Traffic issues will be horrendous: congestion and disruptive of an already disjointed and confusing intersection of Sherman Ave, McGuire St., Warner Dr and Harbort. Sherman and Fordem is a critical route to downtown and the UW campus. The SARA project raises the peril by putting a driveway right in the intersection. The SARA project's 87 parking stalls can be expected to add hundreds of vehicle trips passing through this dangerous intersection.

Light Pollution: Plans for the SARA project show 14 exterior lights on the west side of the building. Right across the street is Burrows Park. Light pollution will ruin park visitors' ability to enjoy the night time in Burrows Park. Neighbors will have the same problem in their yards. The shadows created by the proposed height and mass of this project will negatively impact the greenery on surrounding properties, reduce the daylight available in and around adjacent buildings and significantly reduce the aesthetic appeal of the Banzo Restaurant by towering over it.

Parking: Parking will be a serious issue unless the building includes free parking. If expensive, then renters will find ways to use obvious different areas to park like in the park itself, or in front of others houses in the neighborhood which is already affected by tight parking. We already have parking issues with the McKenzie Place where people don't want to pay for the parking.

Cost and financing: At the two different public meetings the development team was unable to address the pricing and return on investments for the project but then said they had to build as they proposed in order to make a profit. The developer might say that lower density housing would make the project financially infeasible because higher density means higher rental revenues needed for the housing project. That argument is another way of saying that the developer paid too much for the land. Unless the Plan Commission is working for the seller, it is not the job of the Plan Commission to use conditional use permits to raise the price of land in Madison.

Height Limit: At five stories high, the SARA project is over 65% over the allowed height limit. In actuality, as the picture on page one of the project plans shows, the east side of the building is closer to six stories tall. In this neighborhood, most houses are one or two stories tall. There are a few small apartment buildings as well. The one exception is McKenzie Place, which is four stories tall and was a compromise with the neighborhood discussions. The proposed building does not fit the "aesthetic desirability" or character of the neighborhood. Its excessive mass and resulting shadow effects diminish the overall beauty of the surrounding community. And we already have several large apartment towers within two blocks of this proposed building.

Residential Density: The letter of intent says that the SARA project will have 86 residential units. This

number exceeds the 60 units allowed in NMX zoning by 43.33%. This residential density is many times that of the surrounding neighborhood of single family homes and small apartment buildings. The residential density of nearby McKenzie Place is 54.5 dwelling units per acre, which is just 43.25% of the density of the SARA project. As with the excessive height, the excessive residential density of the SARA project means that the proposed building does not fit the "aesthetic desirability" or character of the neighborhood.

This area has neighborhoods with traditional owner-occupied homes and there are modest houses near this proposed development that have been well-maintained for over 100 years. Granting the conditional use requests would inevitably alter the long-established character of the surrounding neighborhood.

Other Design Options: If the SARA project were reduced to the three stories allowed in NMX zoning districts, the number of residential units would be reduced to 45. Both the building height and the number of units would be what is permitted in NMX zoning districts. The current proposed development is even 21.43% higher than the residential density of McKenzie Place. The simple truth is that a large apartment tower is the wrong kind of housing on this site. Instead, the developer should consider row housing, small apartment buildings, or two-story town houses, either in a free standing "cottage court" setting or as shared-wall condos or a mix of the two. NMX zoning permits this kind of housing or allows it with a conditional use permit. Such housing would fit in quite well with the "existing or intended character of the area and the statement of purpose for the zoning district...."

CONCLUSION

The SARA housing project at 2103 Sherman Avenue does not meet the Zoning codes or conditional use approval standards. The proposed building's excessive height and residential density will impair the uses, values and enjoyment of other property in the neighborhood. Traffic generated by this project with 87 parking stalls will add to the dangers of the perilous intersection of Sherman Ave, McGuire St, Warner Dr, and Harbort Dr. Light pollution from lighting on the west side of the building will hinder night time enjoyment of Burrows Park, which is directly across the street. Even if this building may enhance the parking lot it will replace, it will destabilize and devalue other neighborhood properties by making them less desirable to due to increased traffic congestion, parking complications, street noise amplified by the building's mass, and the view and sunlight that will be obscured by the building.

Cities need a balance between rental units and opportunities for home ownership. Achieving this balance in Madison requires a focus on the need of neighborhood residents instead of on the profit of developers. There would be more appropriate mid-housing options for this neighborhood which would be more welcome to this neighborhood and would help purchasing a home in the City more feasible for first-time buyers.

We know that the City has yet to meet a developer they didn't like. Time after time, the City ignores its own codes and conditional use standards to approve developments that do not fit the neighborhood or the environment of that community. We are asking you as Plan Commissioners to really think about what you are approving. None of us are against development and have repeatedly offered examples of what could be developed there. Please be thoughtful in considering why this proposed development is not appropriate. The Developer should go back to the table and come up with a better design or should walk away and allow another developer to come forward.

Thanks for your consideration

Jennifer Argelander
1715 Erie Court
Madison, WI 53704

From: [Nicholas Davies](#)
To: [Plan Commission Comments](#)
Subject: Yes on 2103 Sherman Ave (91289)
Date: Sunday, February 1, 2026 11:59:26 AM

Caution: This email was sent from an external source. Avoid unknown links and attachments.

Dear Plan Commission,

I'm glad to see plans to add housing and commercial space to what is now a surface parking lot at 2103 Sherman Ave. There will even be plenty of parking retained, on the building's lower levels.

Regarding the conditional use request and conditions of approval, I find the proposed plans to be very consistent in scale to Mackenzie Place just to the north, and several existing multi-unit residential buildings nearby, such as Sherman Terrace to the south.

This building will allow more neighbors to live within walking distance of destinations like Banzo, Burrows Park, Madison Pantry, and Far Breton Bakery. If I lived here, Far Breton would be a daily walk. This site is also convenient to transit, as well as bike routes across the isthmus or into downtown. Soon it will be near the Madison Public Market, and perhaps eventually Amtrak. This is an area where additional neighbors will appreciate the opportunity to reside, and the commercial spaces will offer additional amenities to people already living nearby.

With plenty of street parking nearby, I commend the planned parking ratio of <1. An 86 unit building will not have any significant impact on Sherman Ave (5k vehicles per day) or Fordem Ave (10k vehicles per day). Moreover, the city has an adopted policy for a building like this one to manage its transportation demand.

I hope you will approve this project.

Thank you,

Nick Davies
3717 Richard St